

WHY AND WHEREFORE OF FRENCH COLEOPTEROLOGY

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While in England, in Germany, in Italy, and in America, the efforts of the entomologists - amateurs or professionals - have been distributed fairly equally between the different orders of insects, entomology, in France, has always been mostly Coleopterology. The reasons for this are numerous and may be of interest.

First, Most French entomologists (at least 99%) are amateurs and belonging to all social classes, many are far from rich. To such the study of a group needing a microscope, or expensive books, is impossible, no specialist of Lepidoptera or Collembola among them. Next, until quite recently, there was no specialized training in entomology, so the study of difficult groups, supposing a knowledge of morphology (the Odonata or the Coccids for example) was not easily accessible.

Then, most amateur entomologists were, first and last, men with the collecting hobby; they collected insects as they collected stamps, pictures or egyptian mummies; they were interested in such insects as were easy to collect, to prepare, to keep, and spectacular. No Diptera for them.

Practical entomology, while France may boast of such men as Marchal, is of very slight interest in an old country where agriculture is nearer gardening than industry. So the study of Aphids appealed to very few.

And the "coleopterization" of the French entomologists was an autocatalytic process. As more French amateurs devoted themselves to Coleoptera, they prepared more keys and monographs, they explored every inch of their country. So Coleopterology became the best known branch of entomology. Many books, from 1781 onwards, have given a general picture of the French fauna of Coleoptera; Mulsant, Fairmaire, Acloque, Fauconnet, Bedel and his collaborators, Barthe and his, Remy Perrier, the "Faune de France", Portevin, or of a province of France, Caillol for example. Only two or three books were devoted to Lepidoptera or to Hemiptera, none till the recent "Faune de France" covered the Diptera.

The French entomologist disposes of an excellent "Catalogue des Coleopteres de France" no other order of Insects has the same. There is in my book "Les Coleopteres" a summary of the biology of Coleoptera; only Orthoptera have been treated on the same plan in France. France

may boast of the first Coleopterological journal: "Le Coleopteriste" which though short-lived, had a serious influence.

The greatest names of French entomology, Latreille, Lacordaire, Mulsant, Blanchard, Bedel, Jeannel were or are Coleopterists, they contributed to the specialisation of the Entomological collections of the Paris National Museum of Natural History.

The Coleopterological collections of that Museum are, with the recent accessions, at least equal to those of the British Museum, the first in the world 'til now. An amateur group, the "Coleopteristes de la Seine" grouping over 200 members in Paris alone, work in connection with the Museum. It has meetings, quite informal but most dynamic, and it arranges collecting trips, either collective, or in small groups. It has organized a general survey of the fauna of caves, mammal nests, and so on...

So the undifferentiated entomologist has every opportunity of becoming a Coleopterist, very few opportunities of becoming something else. Naturally, all the time, some entomologists refused to follow the general direction and worked in other branches. Many of them were quite excellent, but they nearly always have been free-lances; at least, they had no following. At the present time as soon as the young Coleopterist starts working he find help. A series of magazines: local ones, working in connection with a local society or Museum, then elementary ones, the most read being "L'Entomologiste" with over 700 readers. Then, when he begins to know something about beetles, "La revue française d'Entomologie". Le "Bulletin et les Annales de la Societe entomologique de France". The "Revue de Zoologie, agricole et d'Entomologie appliquee.", etc...

These magazines are not specialized, but as 75% at least of their readers are Coleopterists, they publish mostly Coleopterology; and their columns are open to all workers. All of them, even the most highbrow, publish short notes from young amateurs as well as important papers on the segments of the head by University authorities.

The library of the "Societe Entomologique de France" founded in 1832, is the largest coleopterological library in the world. It is open to all members of the Society and can undertake, either to send micro-films or to send the paper themselves, to all members living outside of Paris and needing them for their work. The library of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle is also open to the public. And the microfilm organization of the Centre national de la Recherche Scientifique enables anybody to get practically any paper.

So the young coleopterist finds every thing ready for him; a friendly association, magazines starting from the very beginning, an easily accessible library, a lot of books and catalogues. I believe, from personal experiences, that these last: faunas, books, catalogues, are the most important incentives to the choice of coleopterology by so many young Frenchmen. So I can only applaud the effort of the "Coleopterists' Bulletin" to do the same for America.